

Briefing on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

<http://curry.virginia.edu/research/projects/threat-assessment>

Developed and field-tested in 2002, based on FBI and Secret Service/Dept. of Education reports

- Threat assessment conducted when a student has made a threat or engaged in threatening behavior
- Step-by-step process in manual, *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence*
- Goal is to prevent violence and return student to school by understanding why student made threat and resolving the conflict or problem that stimulated the threat
- 2013 listed as evidence-based program in the *National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP)*

Each school establishes a multidisciplinary team based on its existing staff of school administrators, mental health, and law enforcement professionals (Schools may adapt team composition to fit their staffing, draw upon law enforcement officers from other schools or community)

- Follows a 7-step decision tree and triage approach, so that most threats are resolved quickly with only a few team members; only the most serious threats require law enforcement and full team involvement (see Figure 1 on next page)
- Teams trained in one-day workshop (additional review of manual needed)

School systems trained:

- 47 Virginia school divisions encompassing 1,000+ schools (see table below)
- Schools in Arizona, California, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Wisconsin
- Canada, Germany

Published research findings from 2 field tests, 3 controlled studies, and 1 state implementation study

- School staff have decreased anxiety, increased knowledge in responding to threats
- Students do not carry out their threats
- Reductions of 50% in long-term suspensions
- Reductions in bullying infractions
- Increased use of school counseling, increased parent involvement
- Students report greater willingness to seek help for threats of violence, more positive views of school personnel

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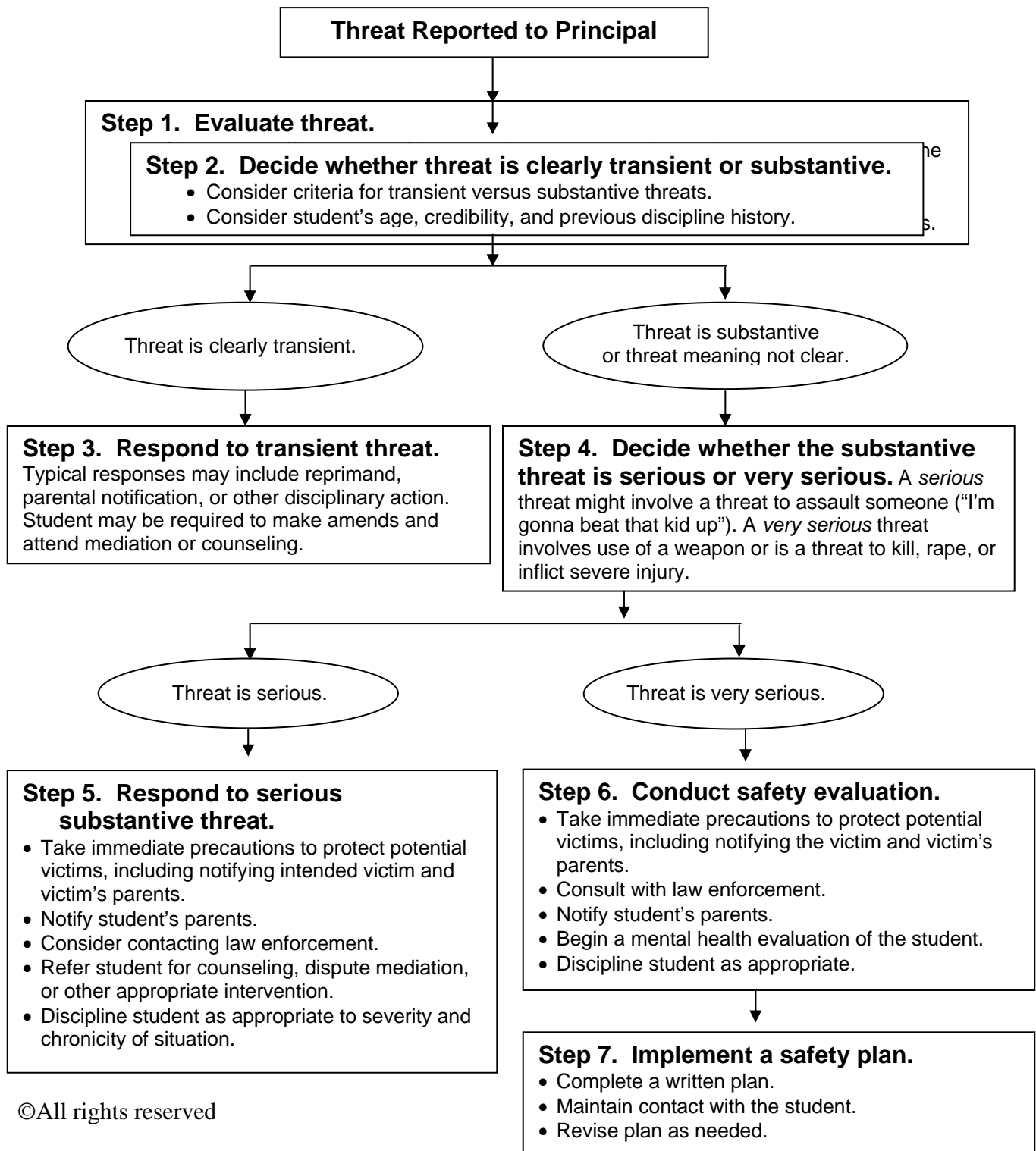
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Figure 1. Decision tree for student threat assessment.



Potential Violence Prevented by Threat Assessment

The following cases were reported by school authorities using our threat assessment guidelines:

A high school student posted on Facebook that he was considering killing himself and individuals on a list. The threat assessment process revealed that the student was depressed, facing juvenile charges, and was fantasizing about a way out of his troubles. Mental health services were provided and the family was involved in a resolution.

A student showed some classmates a knife at school. The information was shared with an adult and the threat assessment team began an investigation. The student was called to the office and a search of his book bag revealed a large knife and a loaded revolver. A threat assessment revealed a perception of being bullied and various family issues. Mental health services and a bullying intervention were provided.

A high school student wrote a play that was about shooting students at school due to bullying. The parents found the written play and brought it to the police, who notified school authorities. A threat assessment revealed that the student was depressed and felt that he was being bullied at school. While he did not have access to weapons, appropriate mental health services and referrals were made.

Parents took their daughter to an emergency room due to suicidal threats contained in letters found in her room. The threat assessment revealed a plan to commit a mass homicide at school with her boyfriend, and then they would then kill themselves. The girl was afraid that she was pregnant and both students thought that the school environment was hostile. They had attempted to locate firearms, but were unsuccessful. Both students received extensive mental health services.

A student made threats to carry out an ethnic cleansing at his school. A threat assessment was conducted that included a search of his home. An unsecured loaded semi-auto pistol was found and confiscated. The child was detained for a mental evaluation. The investigation revealed that he was communicating with an online friend in another state who was considering a similar act. The police in that state were contacted and the individual was arrested.

A high school student was disciplined by school administrators for writing a defamatory remark on his ex-girlfriend's locker. Following the discipline meeting, the student posted on Facebook that he was going to kill the principal and assistant principal. This information was brought by students to the attention of the principal who immediately convened a threat assessment. The team judged the threat to be very serious substantive, resulting in the requirement of a mental health evaluation. The evaluation revealed urgent mental health concerns and significant evidence that he planned to carry out acts of homicide. As a result, mental health intervention was court-ordered and a safety plan involving law enforcement was implemented.

Threat Assessment Training for Virginia schools by University of Virginia

School Division	Year
Albemarle County	2002, 2006
Alexandria	2012
Alleghany County	2004
Amherst County	2002
Appomattox County	2003, 2009
Arlington	2002
Bath County	2005
Bedford County	2004, 2010, 2012
Charlottesville City	2002, 2008, 2010
Chesterfield County	2005
Clarke County	2003
Culpeper County	2005, 2012
Dickenson County	2010
Dinwiddie County	2004
Fairfax County	2003, 2008
Franklin City	2007
Fauquier County	2002
Fluvanna County	2003
Hampton	2009
Hanover County	2008, 2009
Harrisonburg City	2012
Henrico County	2003
Lee County	2006
Loudoun County	2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
Louisa County	2007
Lynchburg City	2006
Madison County	2007
Manassas	2002, 2003
Manassas Park	2002
Nelson County	2003
Newport News	2008, 2009
Orange	2012
Patrick County	2005
Portsmouth	2006
Powhatan County	2004, 2007
Prince George	2012
Prince William County	2004
Pulaski County	2013
Roanoke County	2002, 2008
Roanoke City	2007, 2010
Russell County	2004
Spotsylvania County	2008, 2009
Surry County	2004, 2005
Virginia Beach	2011
Warren County	2004, 2005, 2008
Wise County	2006, 2008
Wythe County	2005